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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MCA](#) [ECON](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: FALL DRAFT EXPECTED TO BE SUCCESS

REF: MOSCOW 255

Classified By: A/DCM Alice G. Wells. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Because Russia now drafts young men to serve in the military for one year, rather than two years or 18 months, the Russian military must replace all of its conscript soldiers in 2008. Official sources and experts agree that the Russian military will meet its goal of conscripting approximately 219,000 young men into the armed forces in the fall draft that began October 1 (up from 133,200 drafted during the spring 2008 draft), in part thanks to the elimination of many draft exemptions. Some experts argue that the reduction in the term of service, along with the current economic downturn, will attract more young men to join the military, which could also assist the military's goal to draft better-qualified young men. Experts doubt that shortening the length of service will improve the hazing problem in the military. Contract soldiers, many of whom serve as noncommissioned officers (NCOs), will have to take on a greater role in training raw recruits, as well as perform some jobs they previously did not do. In a recent poll, most respondents approved of the recent conscription reforms, although some groups would like to abolish conscription in Russia. End Summary.

Drafting More Soldiers Changes Little

¶2. (C) Because the Russian military now drafts young men to serve in the military for only one year, Russia will need to replace all of its conscript soldiers this year. Deputy Director of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy Aleksandr Belkin told us that reducing the term of service for draftees will help the military reach its target of conscripting approximately 219,000 young men into the armed forces this autumn (during the spring draft the military conscripted 133,200 men). "Serving for one year psychologically makes a big difference, rather than serving for two years or 18 months," he argued. More young men will be willing to serve in the military now, he argued. Belkin also posited that the current economic downturn in Russia would also attract some young men to military service who otherwise could not find jobs.

¶3. (U) General-Colonel Vasiliy Smirnov of the General Staff told local press that the military has already taken steps to meet the logistical challenges of drafting such a large number of men, including making sure each conscript receives the uniforms and equipment he needs, and that each has adequate transportation arrangements to reach his post of duty. The experts agree that the draft is going according to plan.

----- GOR Wants to Improve the Quality of Soldiers Drafted -----

¶4. (U) Military commands across Russia want to improve the quality of the young men they draft. For example, the MOD wants at least 25 percent of draftees to have a higher education, up from 21.5 percent in spring 2008 and 13.5 percent in the fall of 2007. In the spring 2008 draft, only 70 percent of young men conscripted had a high school degree. About 30 percent finished the ninth grade, while 0.3 percent had finished only the fourth grade. Nezavisimaya Gazeta reported that some draftees were illiterate. In Chelyabinsk, about 20 percent of draftees were either orphans or from single-parent homes.

¶5. (C) The Head of the Union of Soldiers' Mothers Committees Valentina Melnikova pointed out young men can be found, thanks largely to the elimination of many draft exemptions (reftel), which most experts support. For example, the military will more rigorously enforce the requirement that those who were exempted from the draft while studying now serve their terms after graduation. Other exemptions, such as family obligations, have also been eliminated.

----- Little Effect on Hazing -----

¶6. (C) The experts agree that the shortening the term of service to one year will have little effect on the hazing problem in the military. Hazing, they argue, is a societal problem, and not exclusive to the military. The best way to reduce hazing, according to Ilya Kramnik of RIA Novosti, is to keep soldiers as busy as possible. Melnikova pointed out that the issue is not limited to conscripts hazing their fellow conscripts; sometimes officers and NCOs commit similar acts.

----- Role of Contract Soldiers -----

¶7. (C) Many experts felt that one year is too short a time to serve. It takes almost a year to train a conscript soldier, and during the second year conscripts perform their jobs in the military. With the shortening of the term of service, NCOs (many of whom are contract soldiers) and officers will have to take more responsibility for conscripts, Kramnik argued. Second-year conscripts will no longer be in charge of first-year recruits. Kramnik said the military will have to strengthen its NCO corps if Russia is to have a modern army. NCOs should be professional soldiers with leadership roles. Empowering NCOs along U.S. lines is the only way to ensure proper training of raw recruits, he argued. Other analysts noted that conscript soldiers will likely need to undergo additional refresher training courses in the military reserves.

----- Popular Opinion of the Draft -----

¶8. (U) In an opinion poll of 1,600 people in 42 Russian regions, published October 9, 54 percent of respondents agreed with the Russian policy of shortening the term of service to one year and simultaneously getting rid of many draft exemptions. Forty-four percent, however, said that shortening the draft term to one year would decrease the military's effectiveness. Fifty-two percent of the respondents said they favored mandatory military training courses in high schools, while twenty-nine percent said the training should be offered as elective courses.

¶9. (U) St. Petersburg, however, saw demonstrations by the Stop Conscription movement, which includes members of the Republican Party of Russia, the Yabloko Democratic Party, the

United Civil Front, and the youth movements Oborona and DA!. The organizers originally planned to hold a "March for an All-Volunteer Army" in St. Petersburg's Victory Park, but authorities denied them permission. Arrests were made when some of the activists started distributing leaflets. Yelena Popova of Yabloko and the United Civil Front was fined 800 rubles (approximately USD 30). Stop Conscription activists claimed the arrests were "baseless."

Comment

¶10. (C) Economic pressures are driving the downsizing of Russia's officer corps at the same time as they make filling conscription quotas somewhat easier. As comprehensive defense reform efforts are discussed, the ongoing reliance on draftees continues to bedevil the establishment of a professional Russian military.
BEYRLE